



City of Derby  
2021 State of the City Address  
*As Prepared*

Good evening Derby!

I am before you this evening to deliver the State of the City Address. Our city's charter provides the mayor an opportunity from time to time to "... provide a general statement of the situation, state and condition of the city" (Sec. 9).

It has been a while since I have delivered an address like this to you, and it's been a memorable term, to say the least. I love being the Mayor of our "little city"; and I have such appreciation for the faith and trust you have placed in me.

Tonight, I want to speak directly to every resident about the difficult challenges and decisions we have had to make over the last couple of years. It is because of these decisions and actions that I am proud to report that the State of our City is largely positive with additional improvements expected in the very near future.

My goal here this evening is to give you a brief and broad overview of where we are as a city, and where we plan on going.

When I took office as your Mayor almost four years ago, I inherited city finances that were a mess, and we've worked together to right our fiscal course. Now is our time to focus on investment and economic growth, bringing in additional revenue to take the burden off our residential taxpayers.

Taxes are down 12% over last year and our mill rate has been reduced from 44 to 38-and-a-half. Since I took office in 2017, we've grown the grand list by over a hundred million dollars. And the credit rating agencies - well they agree that we are heading on the right path with our credit rating holding stable! We've been able to work collaboratively with the state's municipal oversight board to identify our challenges, and we've started on the road to correct them!

My administration has undertaken the task of formalizing our human resource practices to ensure we hire the best candidates for open positions. We have consistently done so and the most recent example of this is our hire of a qualified municipal finance professional to lead our fiscal operations. I'm very proud that we have taken the politics out of hiring and the cronyism out of City Hall.

Mayor Stewart in New Britain always says, "People like to invest in cities that are investing in themselves." - I'll take that a step further and say - It is time that we invest in ourselves here at City Hall. Our city employees work hard to serve you, the residents,



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and we'll continue to improve upon the services offered throughout the city.

Just a small preview of what is to come - a downpayment on this investment, in a way - Was when we started a wellness program for City Hall employees in partnership with Griffin Hospital helping our employees live better and healthier lifestyles. We started a farm to city hall program, where we connected local farm-fresh produce with our municipal employees.

When I became your mayor, we were one of two municipalities that were not part of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) - a consortium of all of the cities and towns in the state which represents, advocates, and helps train municipal leaders. Since rejoining CCM, we've had roughly a dozen employees take advantage of the professional development courses aimed at improving how we serve you.

My administration is committed to letting down the ladder of opportunity for youth. That is why we've launched the pilot semester of the "Mayor's internship program" - We were able to provide an opportunity to two college students to work in the mayor's office and finance department. We can't wait to see the good work they produce this semester and what they learn about municipal government!

We've continued to keep our commitment to improving our city's energy profile by upgrading the WPCA Pump Station on Roosevelt Drive, adding LED lighting and other energy efficiencies to all City buildings, upgrading street lights to LED with a savings of \$7000 a month, and entering into contracts with Fuel Cell Energy on two separate projects that will bring the city Five Million dollars in tax revenue over the next twenty years. Before the deals with Fuel Cell Energy were inked, the two properties in question were only producing a combined \$1500 per year in tax revenue and now that number will be \$250,000 - all while providing a boost to our energy grid with environmentally friendly technology.

We've made headway when it comes to cleaning up our city. When it comes to blighted properties, over the last four years we've cleaned up fifty-four of properties and have collected over 13 million dollars of tax liens from an estimated forty-five hundred properties. We've managed to put 28 of the formerly city-owned property back on tax rolls, bringing in an estimated million dollars.

Now we have chatted about the highlights of what we've accomplished; let's take a moment to lay out the vision of where we are going - because I'm just getting started.



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We can have a Derby with sustained economic growth where we invest in transit-oriented development, revitalize downtown, all while providing taxpayer relief.

That is why tonight, I am asking our legislative delegation to submit legislation next session, which my office drafted for them - which will establish an option for municipalities to provide a single-family homebuyers credit!

My vision for this includes significant investment in economic development that will lessen the burden on our residential taxpayers.

We have built a strong relationship with Hartford. Whether it be with our state legislators or staff and commissioners of DOT, DECD, and DEEP. I am excited to announce that while it has taken many years, and several mayors - my administration got the job done by staying the course and we were finally able to put the Route 34 widening/main street reconstruction project out to bid on September 1st!

My goal now is to continue what I've started by focusing on transit-oriented development centered around our multimodal train and bus station. I've met with both of our US Senators as well as Congresswoman DeLauro to impress upon them the importance of capital investment in transportation infrastructure in Derby. This will be a game-changer for not just Derby, but also the entire valley & beyond. They are committed to this and I'm excited about the future.

Right now, we have four approved projects that are valued at roughly \$65 million dollars. These mixed-use and residential developments in our downtown represent an additional 7% boost to our grand list and are projected to net the city over \$1.56 million dollars per year. For the first time in a long time, developers WANT to come to Derby, and I look forward to welcoming them!

One of my favorite tasks as Mayor is participating in different events around the city including sharing coffee and donuts with our elderly residents' at all four of our housing units. Participating in cultural commission events - like when we raised the pride flag for the first time in our city's history - or hosting fundraisers for local community organizations.

Speaking of meeting with our elderly residents', the senior center project continues to move forward, and it is my hope that this Board will vote to approve the merger with Ansonia in the coming weeks after we iron out a final couple of details.



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I would take a moment to thank the following:

Our Board of Aldermen/Alderwomen - President DiMartino - the Board of Taxation, and Department Heads, thank you for your efforts during this unprecedented term. All legislative proposals may start in the office, but without your blessing and efforts, we wouldn't be able to get anything done around here!

Speaking of teamwork, I want to thank the City Hall staff for all their hard work, especially the Mayor's Office Staff: Chief of Staff Andrew Baklik, Administrative Assistant John Board, and Economic Development Liaison Carmen Diczko. Most of what we accomplish through the Mayor's office is truly a team effort and I'm lucky to have you all with me as partners on this journey.

On a personal note, to my girlfriend Sherri - you've been my rock the last couple of years, and I look forward to continuing our life together!

Our school district has been thriving over the last couple of years thanks to the leadership of Superintendent Conway and Board of Education Chair Gildea. Our school district has also had success with grant funding - being awarded almost two million dollars to complete over twenty key projects since I took office. Our school district is one of the few in the State who have stayed fully opened in-person since last fall. This has resulted in our Covid transmission rates being lower than other schools that chose to go strictly remote.

At our elementary schools, we were able to have new STEM programming and our middle schools expanded their special education offerings with additional learning center support. At Derby High School, we've placed an emphasis on manufacturing, having new courses and partnering with Housatonic Community College to offer evening training programs in manufacturing and technology to adults in the community. Our schools have been designated as "Schools of Distinction" by the State Department of Education for the growth in our math assessment scores.

With the help of TEAM, we actively addressed ongoing issues in our community relating to food security, the pandemic and other needs specific to our most distressed community members. Thank you to all the city hall staff who participated to help provide diapers, holiday presents, and farm-fresh meals to our residents.



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Now, how about that fireworks show, to kick off Labor Day Weekend... I would like to send a heartfelt thank you to all the businesses and residents that donated to our annual fireworks show. The success of this event is truly a testament to the sense of community that we have in Derby. Your donations saved the City of Derby over 13,000 dollars.

Lastly, our lives have been forever changed due to the unprecedented global pandemic. Our city and government faced difficult problems and we came up with creative solutions - like working with our business community to accommodate outdoor dining, instituting a masking policy in public buildings, and managing the flow of millions of new federal funds to assist our city in starting to rebuild as we historically approach the end of this pandemic in 2022.

Let's continue the positive momentum that we have cultivated and lead our city in forging a new and better identity as we come out of the pandemic. Now is not the time to take our foot off the gas, it's time to double-down on Derby. Let's continue to travel together on this road to improvement!

Thank you.